

Governors Island, Second Corps Area Headquarters
(First United States Army Headquarters, Pershing Hall
Building #125)
Governors Island
New York Harbor
New York City
New York County
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-10

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PHOTOGRAPHS
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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, SECOND CORPS AREA HEADQUARTERS HABS No. NY-5715-10
(First United States Army Headquarters, Pershing Hall, Building #125)

Location: The building is located north of Andes Road, north of Building #104, Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York, New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard

Present Use: Headquarters for the Atlantic Area and the Third Coast Guard District.

Significance: This building was built as Headquarters and administration building for the Second Corps Area headquartered at Governors Island under the command of Major General Dennis E. Nolan. After its construction, it served as Headquarters for the First Army, headquartered there between 1933 and 1943 and again from 1946 to 1966. The First Army served with distinction in both World Wars.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1934.
2. Architect: The building's architect was Lorimer Rich (1891-1978) of New York City. He was graduated from Syracuse University in 1914. After serving in World War I, he studied abroad in Rome. Between 1922 and 1928, he worked in the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. While employed there, he worked mostly on college facilities, institutional layouts and memorials. After leaving the firm, he was awarded the design of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the National Cemetery at Arlington, Va. Later he went to Washington to aid in designing Federal buildings. (Obituary, New York Times, June 6, 1978).

3. Original and subsequent owners: The War Department of the United States (after 1947, the Department of the Army) owned the building until 1966 when the Island was transferred to the United States Coast Guard.
4. Builder: The contractor for the building was the P.J. Murphy Company of Jamaica, Long Island. (New York Times, March 12, 1934).
5. Original plans and construction: Prints of elevations and plans dated January 12, 1934, are located in Facilities Engineers, Support Center, New York, Governors Island, New York, New York.

The original cost of the structure was proposed to be \$200,000, provided from an allotment of Public Works Funds.

The building was originally planned to be expanded by the addition of wings at either end, eventually producing a U-shaped structure when further funds became available.

6. Additions and alterations: The structure has undergone little external alteration. The most important changes have been made to comply with fire safety codes. In 1978, exterior metal fire escapes were added to either end of the structure and metal doors replaced the windows. At that time, on ground floor of the south facade, two doors were cut through into the interior stairwells to give direct egress. These doorways were decorated with applied wood broken pediments with urn finials. The original entrance located below the open loggia was bricked in and made into windows.

Other changes have been minor. The original 18-light circular window in the north facade has been replaced by a single pane of glass. Skylights were added on the north side of the roof in 1984.

B. Historical context:

Throughout the 1920s, Governors Island served as the headquarters for the Second Corps Area. This corps was established during the peace time reorganization of the Army in 1920 and originally comprised the area of New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Puerto Rico. It was under this command that the building program on the island started in 1929.

In August 1932, four field armies were created as inactive units of the Regular Army. The First Army was assigned the First, Second and Third Corps Areas. In September 1933, the First Army was activated as a paper army commanded by the senior commander of the First, Second and Third Corps Areas. That senior commander was Major General Dennis E. Nolan, Commander of the Second Corps Area. Since no provision for separate staffing was made, Major General Nolan's staff functioned as the First US Army staff when called upon. Thus technically when the new headquarters was built in 1934, both the headquarters of the Second Corps Area and the First Army were located on Governors Island. As the situation in Europe worsened in the 1930s, the role of the First Army became more and more important.

During the period 1933-1941, the First Army planned and carried out maneuvers. In 1939, the Army commanders were given responsibility for the preparations for war, including division and field training, coastal defenses and all war and mobilization planning. In October 1940, the command of the First Army and the Second Corps Area were separated and the First Army was expanded to a complete staff.

Building #125 served as the headquarters for the First Army until October 1943 when the First Army left Governors Island for Bristol, England. During World War II, the First Army served in D-Day action on the Normandy beaches, was the first to arrive in Paris, fought in the Battle of the Bulge and was the first to meet the Russian line.

In June 1946, the First US Army returned to Governors Island where it remained until the First and Second Armies were merged in 1966.

On August 10 1954, Building #125 was dedicated "Pershing Hall" in honor of John J. Pershing, General of the Armies, First Commander of the U.S. Army in 1918.

Since 1966, the building has served as Headquarters for the Third District of the Coast Guard.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is a simple structure with Georgian revival details. There is an elegant recessed loggia with three brick arches.

2. Condition of fabric: The condition of the building is excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is a rectangular brick building, 172' (13 bays) x 50' with a projecting pedimented gabled pavilion on the north facade 3 bays wide. The building is three and a half stories with a basement.
2. Foundations: The foundation is of reinforced concrete.
3. Walls: The walls are brick, laid in Flemish bond with scattered glazed headers. There is a limestone belt course between the first and second stories. In the projecting gable to the north is the date 1934 in applied metal numbers with 19 on one side of a roundel and the 34 on the other.
4. Structural systems, framing: The walls are masonry load bearing walls with an interior steel I beam framework.
5. Porches: At the second story level on the south side is a recessed arcaded loggia with three two-story brick arched openings approached by a curving double brick and granite stairway with a metal railing. The doorway is flanked by two large porch lanterns. On the north side is a projecting iron balcony at the second story level.
6. Chimneys: There are two wide interior brick chimneys with stone caps.
7. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: In 1978, two doorways were added on the south facade at the first story level. These doorways have an applied wood treatment consisting of broken pediment moldings with urn finials. The doors are wood paneled with glass lights. The original doorway on the first floor level on the south side has been converted into a window. At the second story level of the south facade is a paneled door framed in limestone pilasters supporting an architrave with a five-light transom. On the north facade at the first story level are double paneled wood doors outlined in rusticated limestone quoins with keystone. At the second story level are three sets of ten-light double French doors, opening to the iron balcony. On the east and west ends are metal fire doors.

- b. Windows: The first and third story windows on all sides of the building are eight-over-eight light double-hung sash with flat brick arches and limestone sills. At the second story level on all sides of the building are twelve-over-twelve light double-hung sash with limestone lintels and sills with slightly recessed panels underneath. At the third story level on the south side flanking the arched loggia are two twelve-light circular windows. In the projecting pedimented pavilion to the north side is a round pivoted sash window. Basement windows on the north side have iron bars. Flanking the second story entrance on the south facade are two six-over-six light double-hung sash windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a slate gable roof with a cross gable to the north. There are skylights in the roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a limestone cornice along the north and south facades and outlining the projecting gable to the north. Along the north and south facades are lead covered copper gutters with leaders decorated with eagle motifs.

C. Description of Interior: The interior of this structure has been modified as necessary to meet current needs.

- 1. Floor plans: The floor plans generally consist of interior corridors running east-west with offices grouped along either side of this corridor. These have been rearranged as needed. On the second floor in the projecting pavilion on the north side is the Admiral's office. This room has always served as the Commander's Office.
- 2. Stairways: There are two interior stairways consisting of dark soapstone steps and landings.
- 3. Flooring: The floor covering is mostly asphalt tile or carpeting. In the Admiral's office there is a patterned hardwood floor.

4. Wall and Ceiling finish: Most walls are concrete block or gypsum board, and most offices have acoustical ceiling tiles. Along the second floor are wood chair rails and simple wood moldings along the baseboards and ceilings. On the walls are murals painted by T. Loftin Johnson as part of the Federal Art Project in 1938. These depict scenes from American military history from the War for Independence through World War I. The murals were restored in 1952 by Cpl. F.A. Brofos, 800th MPCo. Other work by T. Loftin Johnson includes a mural of historic battles and military leaders in the Cadet Mess at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

In the Admiral's office are applied wood moldings, chair rails and panels. According to the plans, the wall panels were originally meant to be painted with murals. The walls are painted a light yellow-cream color.

5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The doorways on the second floor have elaborate wood moldings with five-light transoms above. Other doorways are modern doors: some solid wood or metal, others wood paneled with glass lights.
 - b. Windows: The windows are set in wood frames.
6. Decorative features and trim: There is a fireplace with a heavily molded cast stone mantelpiece located in the Admiral's office.
7. Hardware: The hardware is modern.
8. Mechanical equipment: There is centralized heating. Cooling is provided by individual units.
9. Original furnishings: None

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: This structure is situated on the site of the second set of storage facility and officer's quarters built in the early days of the New York Arsenal. It replaced two officers housing units. Its siting retains the boundary of the original triangular arsenal complex, but its scale and massing is larger than the buildings it replaced. Along the north facade is the triangular green open space that was the original gun yard. To the south side, Building #104 obscures the monumental entranceway of the curved stairway and recessed loggia.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps and architectural drawings:

The following prints of plans dated January 1934 are available from Facilities Engineering, New York Support Center, Governors Island, New York, New York:

- Elevations
- Sections and Interior Details
- Attic plan, Miscellaneous Details, January 12, 1934.
- Roof Framing Plans
- East Stair Details
- Electrical Work, Basement and First Floor Plans
- Electrical Work, Second and Third Floor Plans
- Electrical Work, Attic Floor Plan and Riser Sheet
- Heating, Ventilating and Plumbing

U.S. Army record drawings, 1950s.

The following prints of plans dated January 1934 are available from the McKim, Mead and White Collection, Tube 565, located in the New York Historical Society, New York City, New York:

- Electrical Work, Basement and First Floor Plans
- Electrical Work, Second and Third Floor Plans
- Electrical Work, Attic Floor Plan and Riser Sheet
- Conduit Drawing for Ray Oil Burner

The following is available from the Lorimer Rich Collection, Record Group 3, Accession No. 554, The George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York:

- Preliminary Study of North Elevation

B. Views

Albums/Prints Completion Photographs of Military Housing Projects 1927-36, National Archives, Still Pictures Branch, Record Group 77-CC. (4 photographs)

Photographs in the Lorimer Rich Collection, Record Group 3, Accession No. 554, The George Arents Research Library, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. (8 photographs)

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Documentation on Cadet Mess, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, HABS No. NY-5708-44, Library of Congress.

New York Times, March 12, 1934, p.36, col.5.

New York Times, June 6, 1978, D17.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Boggs, Major Kenneth L. The Sentinel Isle: A Brief History of Governors Island Fort Jay, 1637-1950, Governors Island, New York.

Koyl, George S., editor. American Architects Directory, New York, New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1962.

McKinzie, Richard D. The New Deal for Artists, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973, p. 28.

Ray, Max A. The History of the First United States Army from 1918 to 1980. Fort Meade, Md.: First United States Army, Field Printing Plant, 1980.

U.S. Army. The Story of Governors Island, New York, New York, 1957.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. It is an addition to work accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. This entailed an historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and documentation of five properties which was completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory were transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984. This project is to document a select list of structures including the New York Arsenal.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard. Katherine Grandine was project historian.